

Residential Study Group (RSG)
September 28, 2016
Arlington Town Hall, First Floor Conference Room
8:45-9:45am

Attendees: Walter Fey, Zoning Board of Appeals; Steve McKenna, Town Manager appointee; Elizabeth Pyle, Town Manager appointee; Bill Copithorne, Real Estate Industry; Pasi Miettinen, Town Manager appointee; Wynelle Evans, Town Manager appointee; Rick Vallarelli, Inspectional Services; Janice Weber, Town Meeting Member; Jenny Raitt, Planning.

The group discussed the following priorities and principles which guide the group:

- Our focus is on teardowns and “mansionization” This is described in the Master Plan as follows:
 - *High residential real estate values have led to demolition of smaller scale houses and their replacement with large houses out of scale with the existing neighborhood. Changes to setback requirements and floor area ratios might be considered to control the size and scale of replacement housing.*
 - *In highly desirable communities like Arlington, rising residential property values continue to put pressure on historic houses, particularly those of modest size or those sited within a large lot. This pressure is especially acute in areas of smaller, modest housing stock, which are vulnerable to demolition for larger homes and multi-family duplexes built to the maximum height and minimum setbacks allowed under zoning. Arlington’s last remaining oversized lots, many of which include historic houses and outbuildings, are also increasingly subject to subdivision and demolition. Furthermore, Arlington is witnessing some loss of historic outbuildings such as carriage houses when owners are unable to find viable uses for these secondary structures. When left vacant and not maintained, these structures slowly deteriorate, leading to unsafe conditions and ultimately demolition. For Arlington’s larger and grander homes, the town is witnessing a trend of building repair and restoration efforts by new owners interested in preservation. However, contemporary living styles are spurring significant interior remodeling and the construction of large additions. The incremental loss of historic building features, such as decorative trim and original multi-pane wood windows, and the construction of large additions that overwhelm the smaller, historic structure result in an incremental “fading” of Arlington’s historic character. This loss of building fabric, whether through outright demolition or incremental loss is occurring despite Arlington’s demolition delay bylaw, which is triggered only if a property is inventoried, and ultimately offers only a temporary reprieve from demolition. Many of Arlington’s historic resources remain undocumented and are therefore not subject to the demolition delay bylaw. To address the deficiencies of demolition delay legislation, some communities have adopted provisions that require building officials to notify the local historical commission when any building is proposed for demolition in order to determine historic significance. To permanently protect threatened buildings, some municipalities have designated the properties as single-building historic districts or placed preservation restrictions on the properties.*
- Further, the group would like to focus on improving housing quality, energy efficiency, and community priorities such as reducing carbon emissions, increasing affordable housing, and town economics. In essence, the group will follow the principles outlined in the Master Plan. The group believes it is important to recognize private property rights and the possible need for grandfathering. Every rule has a consequence
- The following issues are priorities that the group would like to explore:

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- Address building setbacks - Homes on same street should align rather than averages in current ZBL.
- Address potential development on irregular lots. (How many of these remain?)
- Parking, driveways and streetscape. (What did the engineering report state about appropriate grade changes?)
- Consider any fiscal impacts – taxes / revenue of new housing
- Noise from trucks and machinery
- Building heights - a 2 ½ story home looks larger (Should building heights be set by district?)
- Lot coverage of replacement housing
- Special permit / variance process (Review of proposed projects and research on hearings / types process, and stated need for expansion. ZBA – hearing for additions 750ft – increase to streamline process.

The group agreed to hold site visits on Saturday, October 8 at 9:30 a.m. meeting at 96 Oakland Ave., the site of a recent teardown. Other suggested locations including Dorothy Road, Mary and Beacon Streets, the Dallin school area, and Kensington. Jenny will confirm the itinerary with the group.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, October 13 at 8:45 a.m.